Inquiry in Coaching

I recently had the chance to attend a workshop for parents at an international school implementing the PYP (Primary Years Program) from the International Baccalaureate Organization. In the workshop teachers were explaining to parents the role of inquiry as the instructional strategy used when exploring the transdisciplinary themes of the program.

Parents were shown an inquiry model designed by Kath Murdock. As I was reviewing Murdock's phases of inquiry, it struck me that there was a parallel with the coaching process.

Murdock's Phases of Inquiry:
Tuning in to students' thinking-*. Establishing the 'known', connecting to students' lives, sense of purpose for inquiry, first thinking, first invitation for questions*
Finding out-*gathering information from a range of sources, working as researchers, continuing to raise questions, learning skills of investigation*
Sorting out- *analyzing information, looking for patterns, reviewing thinking, making meaning, expressing new understandings*
Going further- *personal and small group pathways of investigation, taking learning further, personalizing*
Synthesizing and reflecting- *reviewing earlier thinking, identifying changes in understanding, making connections between ideas, identifying what has been learned*
Acting and applying- *sharing new learning with others, making a difference with my learning, applying to new contexts, creating/constructing/doing*
Coaching:
Pre Conference–**Tuning into thinking** is a great way of describing the conversation between teacher and coach. As the teacher describes a focus for the coaching, she is identifying what she knows and what she wants to find out through the coaching activity. Elements of **finding out** and **sorting out**are in the coach's questions and the teacher's thinking. The teacher will want to **find out** and **sort out**during the post conference. Sharing this thinking in the pre- conference

prepares the coach and the teacher to focus on collecting the necessary information during the lesson/observation.

Observation: In many ways the coach and the teacher are research partners. An effective pre-conference focuses both and sharpens their observation skills for f**inding out** and **sorting out**.

Post Conference– The post conference begins with the teacher and coach sharing their observations and continuing the **finding out** and **sorting out**, leading to a personalized meaning for the teacher **(going further).** This may lead to new questions turning the post conference into a pre-conference for another observation and data collection. The personalization may lead to s**ynthesis** producing an idea for change in the teacher's practice. **Acting and applying** occur as the teacher maps out "what to do next". Planning for the coach to return and observe the changed teacher behavior in practice starts the process over.

Similar to the impact of teacher/student relationships in the classroom, as the coaching relationship extends–trust and knowing increase. That increase in trust and knowing sets the stage for greater risk-taking in both exploration and reflection. Just as teachers learn from their students' inquiry, coaches grow and learn from teachers' inquiry. (A big payoff for investing time in coaching a colleague.) A teacher serving as a peer coach is in a strong learning position.